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ABSTRACT

Educators are meant to chip away the defensive facades so many at-risk student build around themselves so that the achiever inside can be released. Teachers, counselors, and administrators can help at-risk students claim self-esteem; move away from external to internal source of motivation; and take responsibility for their own lives by employing five techniques: (1) developing the kind of positive educator/student relationship that enables students to make commitment to their own growth; (2) focusing on methods for "stretching" a strength rather than remediating a weakness; (3) replacing negative expectations of students with positive ones; (4) learning to facilitate, rather than tell or direct, changes in behavior, which is the key to empowering students to take responsibility for their own lives; and (5) introducing students to positive role models. Role models can be extremely powerful influences. Most successful adults have role models who have influenced their lives, and these role models were most often identified early in the teenage years. Another meaningful category of role models can be found among peers. Peers who have succeeded in overcoming failure, abuse, or difficult personal circumstances can be useful role models for at-risk students. (Author/BHK)

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DEVELOPING SELF-ESTEEM AND INTERNAL MOTIVATION IN AT-RISK YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

In a speech given at the National Council for Self-Esteem Conference in Orlando, Florida on March 23, 1990, nationally-known expert on self-esteem and motivation, Constance H. Dembrowsky, shared the keys to developing internal motivation in at-risk youth. The session focused on five practical techniques teachers, counselors, and administrators can employ to help at-risk students (1) claim self-esteem, (2) move from an external to an internal source of motivation, and (3) take responsibility for their own lives. The first technique involves developing the kind of positive educator/student relationship that enables students to make a commitment to their own growth. The second technique involves focusing on methods for "stretching" a strength rather than remediating a weakness. The third technique involves replacing negative expectations of students with positive ones. The fourth technique involves learning to facilitate, rather than tell or direct, changes in behavior, which is the key to empowering students to take responsibility for their own lives. The fifth technique involves introducing students to positive role models.

I would like to start today with an anecdote that not only captures the essence of what I am going to talk about, but also exemplifies my vision of what education really is. It is a story about Michelangelo.

Michelangelo had been working for quite some time on a particularly large block of stone, sculpting it into a single figure. He was at the point in his work where the facial features were beginning to emerge from the marble. One of his new apprentices had been particularly fascinated with this whole project, as month after month he observed Michelangelo working on it. Finally, as Michelangelo reached the point where the facial features began to appear, the apprentice stopped the master and asked, "How is it that you do that? How can you take that block of stone and envision what it is that you want it to be?" Michelangelo replied, "Oh, it doesn't work that way. The figure already exists within the block of stone. All I do is to chip away the marble and free the beautiful figure inside."

I think that, as educators, this is what we are meant to do--chip away the marble to free the beautiful human being that already exists inside each of our students. I want to share with you five techniques you can use to chip away the defensive facades that so many at-risk students build around themselves so that you can help release the real achievers inside.

Now I will grant you that some of the students we encounter seem to have an extra thick layer of marble protecting that beautiful human being that exists on the inside. Therefore, to

demonstrate that these techniques are practical, not just theoretical, I will share with you some examples from my own work with at-risk children.

One of the things that happened after I moved out of the classroom and started writing curriculum materials was I discovered I really missed the opportunity to work with students. Because I missed this aspect of teaching so much, I decided to create opportunities for myself so that the experience still exists.

So what I do periodically--about every other summer, actually--is find a school district with a very high drop-out rate and donate my time, all the materials, and all my staff's time to the school district. I ask the school for only two things: a large room and their worst students. Some of these are the students who have already dropped out. Some are at-risk students--students with high truancy rates, students who are in trouble with the law, and students who are on drugs. I take these at-risk students and work with them three hours a day for six weeks.

So we have identified our at-risk students. How do we start? Where do we begin? The first thing I think we need to do is develop the motivation to learn. I would like to share with you a quote from a sixteen year old student who went through the summer program I did in 1986. I think this quote exemplifies the kind of approach we need to take with at-risk students. Scott

Jewell said, "You've got to teach them the desire to learn before you can teach them the knowledge."

As educators, I think our first responsibility is NOT to deliver instruction. Our first responsibility is to get the students motivated to learn. If we look at this issue of motivation, we see that it is not a quality that a person either has or does not have. Every human being is motivated. It is, rather, a question of what kind of motivation a person has, because motivation exists on a continuum from external motivation to internal motivation.

If we look at the qualities or the characteristics of students who are functioning on the external end of the motivational continuum, what we discover is that these students put forth effort for external rewards such as stickers, stars, points, free time, social events, grades, recognition, awards, or special privileges. When students do this, where is the factor that is controlling their lives? It is outside them. That puts the students in a powerless position in determining what happens to them in life. In effect, this kind of individual lives a life governed solely by external forces. In essence they are controlled by the person who sets the reward, and thus see themselves as powerless. Because of this victim position, the person does not have a strong sense of self. Because of the focus on immediate gratification of the external rewards, these students are actually hindered and in some cases prevented from developing a sense of long-term vision about their lives and

futures. Without a long-term vision about what they want to be five, ten or twenty years in the future, these students have no direction or purpose in their lives. When we structure systems in our classrooms that are based on external rewards, we are actually creating dependent rather than independent human beings.

In contrast, if we look at the qualities and characteristics of students who are functioning on the internal end of the motivational continuum, what we discover is that these students put forth effort because they realize that by such effort they are stretching their talents, gaining a sense of self-satisfaction, improving their chances of success, and stretching their potential. Where is the factor that is controlling these students' lives? It is inside them. That puts the students in a powerful position in determining what happens to them in life. Such individuals live lives governed by an internally-generated sense of self, and have long-term visions of what they want to be doing with their lives in the future. These long-term visions give the students two critical elements that promote success in life - direction and purpose. How many of the at-risk students with whom you work have a direction and purpose in their lives?

The externally motivated students need immediate gratification. These students cannot delay the reward or the payoff. They become dependent on the system, and this hinders them from becoming independent self-starters. Conversely, the internally motivated students are able to delay gratification. They have figured out that it makes sense to put forth effort

today--even though there is no immediate reward for this effort--because it is a means of moving along toward making the long-term vision a reality. Completing the math assignment now makes sense because it means passing math, which means graduating from high school, which means being able to get that job you want, get into a trade school, or get into college. Therefore, our first goal in working with at-risk students is to help them move from being externally motivated toward a position where they are more internally motivated. We must keep in mind that the trip from external to internal motivation does not consist of a single step. There are four million steps along the way. The goal is to get our students to move continually closer to the internal end of the motivational continuum and thus, further away from the external end.

Today, I will review five of the principal techniques that enable us, as educators, to help students become internally motivated. The first technique involves establishing a relationship with each student. This is important because we know that students learn best if they are in a classroom with a teacher with whom they have a relationship. I am not suggesting students cannot learn anything from a teacher with whom they don't have a relationship. What I am saying is that students learn more, better, harder, and faster if they are in a classroom with a teacher who has taken the time to get to know each student individually and to establish a genuine bond. If our goal is to help students become internally motivated, then acquiring

knowledge for the sake of knowledge is not enough. Instead, we want to maximize each learning opportunity. Building a relationship with each student is one of the most important ways for a teacher to maximize each learning opportunity for students.

To give you an example of how establishing a relationship with students works to develop internal motivation, I would like you to think back over your own career as a learner. I would like you to think back through elementary school, junior high, high school, and college. Select a teacher from your own experience. Pick one you remember as a truly outstanding educator. Now, think of two or three qualities that teacher possessed which made him or her a truly outstanding educator.

Let me give you my example. My outstanding educator was my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Wilson. The two qualities I remember about her are the fact that she thoroughly enjcyed what she did, as evidenced by the fact that she smiled constantly, and that she "went the extra mile." When I arrived in Mrs. Wilson's sixth grade classroom, I was hardly the type of student a teacher was overjoyed to see appear on the class list. By the time I entered the sixth grade, I had racked up considerable hours in the principal's office discussing such things as "appropriate" and "inappropriate" behavior. Now, after five years of elementary school you would think I could have figured out the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behavior!

The reason the principal and I kept having these discussions had nothing to do with appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

The real issue was that when I entered the sixth grade, I could not read. As with most students who have academic difficulty, it is preferable to be considered a "discipline problem" by your teachers than to be considered dumb by your peers. Through the first five years of my schooling, I was in the slow learning group. Now, of course, they didn't refer to us as "the slow learning group." Instead, they gave us euphemistic names such as the Bluebirds, the Redbirds, the Robins, and the Jays. But no matter what ornithological name they gave us, a Turkey by any other name is still a Turkey.

Do you know how I could tell I was in the Turkey reading group? Teachers don't smile at Turkeys. Except, that is, for Mrs. Wilson. When I walked into Mrs. Wilson's room the first day of class she was standing at the door. She smiled at me and said, "Hi!" I was so taken aback I thought she probably just didn't know who I was. But on the second day, just as on the first, she looked at me, smiled at me, and called me by name. I thought, "This is strange. She obviously doesn't know the rules of the game. Teachers are not supposed to smile at Turkeys." But, much to my surprise and delight, Mrs. Wilson continued to demonstrate she didn't know the rules of the game day in and day out. Several times every day she would look directly at me, call me by name, and smile. What do you do when somebody smiles at you? You smile back.

After a couple of weeks, I was just beginning to think that sixth grade might not be such a bad place after all. Then IT

happened again: Mrs. Wilson asked me to stay after school a few minutes. I knew it--now I was in trouble. I thought I would be sent to the principal's office where the inevitable call would be placed to my mother! But Mrs. Wilson said, "Connie, I asked you to stay after school today because I can tell you are a very kind person. I know this because every time I smile at you, you smile back. I've been looking for a really special, kind person to help me. You see, I have a personal problem. I've never told this to anybody before, but I'm a little nervous about teaching reading. So, I was wondering if you could help me out by staying just a few minutes after school every day and letting me practice the reading lesson with you so I won't be so nervous the next day when I have to teach the entire class." What student wouldn't come to the aid of this poor teacher and say, "Sure! I'll help you out!"

Three months later we were working after school one day when Mrs. Wilson said, "Connie, I was talking to Mrs. Saxelbee today in the lunchroom. A new third grader just transferred to her classroom and that poor little girl is way behind in reading. You have been so helpful to me, I was wondering if we could release you for half an hour every day and have you go down to Mrs. Saxelbee's room to help that little girl learn how to read."

If you want somebody to really know a subject, what do you ask them to do? Teach it. You never really master anything until you teach it to someone else. Several things happened to me in the sixth grade, the least important of which was that I

did indeed learn to read. The most important thing that happened to me was that, for the first time in my school career, I began to believe I was not dumb. What an incredible gift to give to a learner!

When I ask adults about the characteristics of their most outstanding teachers, the responses I get most often are "caring," "fair," "consistent," "genuine," "open about self," "positive," "supportive," "maintained students' dignity," "warm," "encouraging," "involved outside of class," "understanding," "accepting," "motivating," "exciting," "good listener," "high expectations," "liked kids," "patient," "core belief that kids CAN DO IT," and "dynamic." I also get phrases such as "had a sense of self-awareness," "demonstrated a real passion for their subjects," and "pushed students to their limits."

One day, when thinking about the words and phrases most commonly used to describe outstanding teachers, I was suddenly aware of what a small percentage of the qualities are cognitive and what a large percentage are affective. When I ask groups to think back about their outstanding teachers' qualities, the majority (80% to 90%) are always affective. Is an outstanding teacher the one who knows the most about biology? No. The outstanding teacher is the one who knows most about building relationships with students. We call ourselves by the wrong name--teachers--yet we can't teach anybody anything. What we are is facilitators of learning.

To make the connection clear as to what establishing a relationship with our students has to do with helping students become internally motivated, ask yourself this: considering your outstanding teacher, how hard were you willing to work in that teacher's class as compared to other teachers' classes? Much harder, right? How did the teacher get so much out of you? By building a relationship.

A word of caution is in order. Building a relationship with students is not to be confused with winning a popularity contest. A popularity contest is a one-way street. The teacher who is out to win a popularity contest is only interested in being liked. Such a teacher does not necessarily return the favor. In fact, in an attempt to be well-liked, such teachers will often do things that are neither in the best interest of the students nor of learning.

Building a relationship is a mutual process. It is a two-way street that means liking goes both ways: the teacher likes each student and each student likes the teacher. The interactions that take place between both parties are based on the affective qualities we just listed--all of which are relationship-building qualities.

I would like to address just one relationship-building quality for a second. It is the one that is called being "fair." What do you think students mean when they say they like a teacher "who is fair?" Is it to be treated the same as the rest of the students? That's what I used to think fair meant. Then I had an

experience that forever changed my concept of the meaning of the word "fair."

Several years ago I was the Director of Special Education in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. I got a call one afternoon from my mother. She said that my father was in a coma and was dying. My parents were in Eugene, Oregon. So I called the airport and got a seat on the next plane out of Jackson Hole to Denver where I could make connections to Portland. However, I was informed there was only one more flight to Portland that day out of Denver and that it was already full. I was told to ask to be put on the wait list as soon as I got to Denver.

When I arrived in Denver, I went right over to the gate and learned that there were six other people in front of me on the wait list. Now, if "fair" means treating everyone the same, then, by definition, I should have remained number seven on that wait list since the order should be determined based on a "first come, first served" basis. However, after I explained the situation, the ticket agent placed my name at the top of the list. As it happened, the plane was full and no one on the wait list was able to board. Again, however, the ticket agent, being sympathetic to my situation, got on the plane, explained my predicament to the passengers, and asked for someone to volunteer to give up a seat. Fifty-two people volunteered.

When a student says "fair" to me now, I no longer think in terms of treating "everyone exactly the same." I believe fair

means looking at each student individually and taking into account the circumstances that are unique to that person's situation.

The second technique for helping students become internally motivated is to focus on the positive. Again, an internally motivated student is one who is willing to put forth an effort without requiring an immediate reward for the effort. Such students are taking responsibility for their own learning. Focusing on the positive is a key factor in making this happen.

I would like to share another personal experience that enabled me understand the importance of focusing on the positive in helping students to become internally motivated to learn. I learned this lesson very early in my teaching career--in fact, on my third day in the classroom.

When I started my teaching career many years ago, there was a teacher shortage in California. The shortage was so severe that there was only one requirement for being hired: you had to be breathing. And, in some cases, they were even willing to waive this requirement!

I was hired to teach first grade. I was totally "prepared" to do this because I had just graduated with a degree in Art History and German Linguistics. Mind you, I had not taken Milk Money 101. I had not taken Bulletin Boards 203. I had not even taken Introduction to Lining-Up! So, the first day in that first grade classroom about the only thing I managed to accomplish was getting the students separated from their parents.

By then it was the end of the day. Then came the second day. By this time I had figured out that first grade had something to do with reading, and that reading had something to do with the alphabet.

There were a few subtleties of teaching that I had not yet grasped. Such as introducing things one step at a time. So I put the entire alphabet on the board, gave the students that paper with the big space for the picture at the top and the big lines and dots along the bottom, and told them to write the alphabet. Much to my students' credit they all embraced the task.

Because I was the new teacher on the block, I had been observing other teachers' behavior so that I could fit right in to this culture. One of the things I noticed was that to be considered a real teacher, you had to carry papers home every day. Well, there I was, on the job just two days and already a real teacher because I had my stack of alphabet papers to carry home. Actually, I made two trips around the outside of the school just so everybody would see that I was carrying home papers! I went home and dutifully corrected them by putting a big red circle in every place little balls weren't on the lines or where the little sticks didn't match. I brought the papers back the next day.

It was my third day in school. Teddy Jones was sitting there, the first student to get his paper back. You must understand about Teddy. He was every teacher's dream student.

Teddy was the kind of student who is so ready to learn he can hardly stand it. His mother told me he had been practicing for school two weeks before the first day--getting up, getting dressed, packing his lunch box, and walking to school so he'd be on time. This student really WANTED to learn. When I gave him back his paper, I watched a human being disintegrate before my very eyes as he looked at all those red marks.

I immediately took the paper back and said, "Teddy, I made a terrible mistake." Then I put all the papers on my desk. After the students left, I tore up the papers, and from that day to this I have never again circled or marked anything wrong on a student's paper. Instead, I mark the things they do correctly.

Do you know what? Students are sharper than you would imagine. They quickly figure out that if you do not circle or mark it, it's wrong. My first graders soon came to me and said, "You didn't circle this one. What's wrong with it?" I replied, "Gee, I'd like to help you, but I'm not going to be able to help because several years ago I was quite ill, and I had to have an eye transplant operation. They transplanted both of my eyes. Now the operation was a great success and I see really well except for one problem: my new eyes aren't able to recognize any mistakes. I can only see what you did right."

How, then, are students ever going to learn if you don't tell them what they did wrong? When I correct papers and circle what is right, I also make a separate list of everything they miss. I review the list to determine what they may not have

understood. This list becomes my guide for what I teach the next day as I integrate a review of these concepts into my next lesson. Then I give the students a new assignment with the same kinds of examples they missed the day before. They now have more information and are able to start anew with a fresh piece of paper. In effect, I'm setting them up to succeed instead of fail.

Which student is going to be more motivated to do the paper? The one who is allowed to work with a fresh piece of paper or the one who is made to go back and fix what is wrong? The issue is subtle, but very powerful in developing internal motivation.

There is another grading technique that I use. Usually the first two or three months in a classroom I do all the grading. After that, I never grade anything anymore. Who is grading the work? The one person who should be evaluating the work--the student. After all, who is the most important critic in your life? You are. What do you usually point out to yourself? Your mistakes. We are our own worst critics. I train students how to be their own best critics by looking at what they did really well, and then figuring out how they can do it more often.

It is a very interesting phenomenon of human behavior that the behavior you draw attention to is the behavior that will be repeated. How often we draw attention to the negative behavior instead of the positive behavior!

When students grade their own papers, it is a perfect opportunity to individualize. For example, suppose my students

have a writing assignment. They complete it, hand it in, and I give it back to them. Suppose that a student named Jo has been having trouble recognizing a complete sentence. When I give her the paper back, I say, "Jo, please read this through and circle all the complete sentences you can find."

Guess what Jo does when she finds a sentence that isn't complete? She fixes it. She is learning to proofread her own work. Now she is keyed to be more aware of complete sentences.

When we say that we are good at turning out students who can't write, have you ever considered why? To some degree it's because we've trained them NOT to write. The student writes a two-page theme and gets it back weighing forty pounds because there is so much red ink on it! The student thinks, "How can I get less red ink on my papers? Write less!" Through the years of school we have trained students to write entire themes that consist of a single paragraph with only three sentences!

What if we were to change our whole approach and have students circle only what is right? Now the red marks would become a form of focusing on the positive. Then students would quickly figure out that, in order to find more positives in their work, they would have to write more, not less. We need to stop and analyze not just what our explicit goals are, but also examine the subtle outcomes we create in students through our implicit behaviors.

Grading positively is a fairly revolutionary kind of thing, so don't go back and do it with all of your students. Pick one

class or one subject area and start grading papers positively with that one group. Do it for one semester. Compare the two methods, and judge for yourself the difference in the motivation level of students who are graded positively versus those who are graded negatively.

This brings us to the third technique for helping students become internally motivated--developing positive expectations about their behaviors. There are very few absolutes in life, but this is one of them. I guarantee you, students are doing it right more often than they are doing it wrong, but it just seems to be the other way around. The reason is because we have created negative expectations about the students' behaviors.

All of us have a small group of nerve endings at the base of our brain called the reticular activating system. That group of nerves acts like a filter which sends information to both your conscious and your subconscious mind. You can program this filter, thereby directing the information that enters your conscious mind.

For instance, have you ever had the experience of driving down the freeway and having somebody mention something about green pick-ups? For some time afterward, there seems to be an inordinate number of green pick-ups on the road. Who put all those extra green trucks on the road? There aren't really any more green pick-ups than there ever were. What happened is you programmed your reticular activating system to see green pick-ups. It directed the information about green pick-ups to your

conscious mind, while all the information about all the other vehicles on the road went into your subconscious mind.

This is, unfortunately, what we also do with information about our students. John, I tell myself, is never on time. In reality, he is punctual seven times in a row, but late the eighth time. What will I notice? The one time in eight he's late. In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, I have programmed myself to think of John as a student who is late.

Most of you are probably familiar with the Pygmalion Effect in the classroom and the power of expectation. To summarize briefly, some researchers went into a school and gave all the students an IQ test. They told the teachers they were testing a new intelligence measure which had an added "Late Bloomer's Index." This index identified students who had not done very well, but who had high potential.

The researchers then randomly selected twenty percent of the student population, typed their names on a list, and entitled it the "Late Bloomers List." This, of course, was intended to be a confidential list, but it just happened to be mislaid on the table in the teacher's lounge! As might be expected, two and a half seconds later every teacher in school knew all the names on the "Late Bloomer's List."

The researchers packed up their bags, went back to the university, came back to the school a year later, and tested the students again. Guess what they found. The so-called "late bloomers" had blossomed! What was the only difference between

these students and the students who had not made the "Late Bloomers List?" The teachers' expectations of their performance.

How does this Pygmalion Effect actually work? If I have the expectation that Aaron is going to perform well, is there some kind of weird brain wave going from me to Aaron that suddenly makes him do better? No. What does happen, however, is that my expectation that Aaron is going to perform well programs my body to behave consistently with what my expectation is. As a result, I am going to execute hundreds of subconscious behaviors that are consistent with my expectations of Aaron's behavior. For example, I may smile at Aaron more often than at students of whom I have lower expectations. When I deliver instruction, I may stand closer to Aaron than other students. I may call on Aaron more often so he has a greater opportunity to participate. And, when he doesn't know the answer, I will give him five to ten seconds of "wait time" to think of it. The subtle message to Aaron and to the other students is that I think he is smart enough to come up with the answer so I am willing to give him time to figure it out.

Because I don't expect Barbara to do well, when I ask her a question and she doesn't know the answer, I go right on with, "Sylvia, do you know the answer?" Barbara just got a double whammy. Number one, she doesn't know the answer--which is embarrassing enough. Number two, my behavior conveys the message that I don't think she is smart enough to figure it out, so I

don't give her any time. Instead, I go right on to the next person.

We project hundreds of such positive or negative subconscious behaviors every day--behaviors which are consistent with our expectations of students. That's why what we expect to happen has a tendency to come true. How do we eliminate such subconscious behaviors? We reprogram our expectations by writing down the negative ones, then destroying them. It works like this. Suppose, for example, Nancy doesn't make it to class on time. Limit yourself to this one negative expectation. It does not work to say Nancy doesn't get to class on time, she doesn't hand in her homework, she doesn't participate in class, and so forth. Deal with only one negative expectation at a time and be sure to include the student's name. Thus, in this example, one would write down on a piece of paper this sentence: "Nancy doesn't get to class on time."

Now, rephrase your expectation in a positive way on the same piece of paper and write it in the space below the negative expectation. If your negative expectation is that Nancy doesn't get to class on time, then your positive expectation should be stated as if it is already happening: "Nancy makes it to class on time." Notice that the expectation is written in the present tense (as if it were already happening) and is stated positively. This process is not effective if you state it negatively: "Nancy is not late for class." It is imperative that you eliminate all the negative aspects from the expectation.

You now have a negative expectation ("Nancy doesn't make it to class on time") and a positive expectation ("Nancy makes it to class on time"). How are we going to replace one with the other? Tear the negative expectation off the page. Then wad it up in a tiny little ball. Wad it all up. Now throw it in the waste-basket. In effect, you are physically destroying the negative expectation and discarding it once and for all.

Why do you do this? Why actually write out your negative expectation, tear it off the sheet of paper, wad it up, and throw it away? If you just say you are not going to think about the negative expectation anymore, every time you think of that student it will come back up, because, in your subconscious mind, you have developed an expectation about that student's behaviors. But, as a result of your physical actions, the next time you think about the student the negative expectation will be less likely to come to your awareness. The positive expectation has literally taken its place. It is all that is left. That is why you write out the positive expectation before you destroy the negative one.

When talking about the reticular activating system, I mentioned that all information is filtered through it. Part of it gets filtered into our conscious mind and part of it into our subconscious mind. The next step, then, is to firmly plant the new positive expectation about a student in your conscious mind by reinforcing it with supporting evidence. This is the most challenging part of the process.

The key is to think of five SPECIFIC examples of when a particular student has demonstrated the behavior of your positive expectations. When I mean specific, I mean REALLY SPECIFIC. For instance, if the positive expectation is, "John hands in his homework," one example of specific supporting data might be: "Last Tuesday, during third period, when I called for the papers at ten after eleven, John handed in his homework paper." Be very specific in terms of date, place, time, and circumstances. The more specific you can be, the more powerful the activity will be in terms of changing your expectation of the student's behavior.

If you stopped the activity here and never did anything else, this, in and of itself, would be beneficial. What will happen now is that when you go back and work with this student, you will start noticing more and more of the positive things the student does. However, there is another step you can take if you really want to reinforce the expectation. I call it the Three-and-a-Half-Second Conference. It is not actually three and a half seconds, but it is quick.

Consider your positive expectation and examples. Ask the student to stop in after school for a couple of minutes because you have something you want to talk about. These conferences are always one way. You are not practicing good communication skills or effective listening at these times. During a Three-and-a-Half-Second Conference, you are simply delivering information.

When the student comes into the room, state your positive expectation as a fact and then quickly list the examples you have

identified that illustrate that your expectation is true. For example, you might say, "Hi, Tammy, I'm so glad you stopped by. Tammy, I wanted to tell you how impressed I am because I notice that you have been completing your work. Yesterday at 9:00, when we did the in-class math exercise, you handed in your paper right on time. And last Thursday, when I asked for the journals at the beginning of class, you handed yours in right away. I am so impressed with the effort you are making to complete all of your work. Thanks, Tammy. I'm glad you stopped by."

You can expect that the student may do everything from ignoring you to rejecting openly what you are saying. The student may even say, "But I didn't do those things." Whatever the student's reaction, just go through your list without stopping and without acknowledging the denials.

Even though the student's behavior may indicate rejection of what you are saying, the student is really taking it all in. Remember, the behavior you draw attention to is the behavior that will be repeated. What you will find is that over the next several weeks and months this student's work will improve.

The fourth technique for helping students to become more internally motivated is a technique called facilitating. I think there are three basic ways that we can interact with other human beings when we want to help them. The most frequently used is simply telling someone what to do. Have you ever told a friend what to do in a problem situation? Is your advice followed? No, of course not! Why? When you tell people what to do, you are

putting yourself in a position of power and control over them. People resist having their power and control taken away.

It is particularly true when you work with adolescents. The number one item on an adolescent's "job description" says "establish independence." Have you ever noticed that when adolescents do something for the first time, they don't do it with a great deal of finesse? Teenagers don't become independent adults very gracefully.

When you tell students what to do, the subtle message is they aren't able to figure it out for themselves. In other words, they need somebody to tell them what to do.

The second way to help involves giving students a list of options from which to choose. This is just as controlling. It works something like this: "Well, Mikka, what you could do is this...or another thing you could do is this...or one other thing you might consider is this...or have you thought of...?" You give students a shopping list. This way, while it has the appearance of having students making choices for themselves, the fact is, the real power and control remain with the person creating the shopping list of options. Essentially, then, what has been communicated to Mikka is that she needs help with selecting the options--which, after all, is the part which embodies the most power. Again, a negative message is conveyed to Mikka regarding her capabilities.

The third and most powerful way of helping students take responsibility for their own lives is to facilitate. This simply

involves asking the students open-ended questions which help them discover the options on their own. "Sylvia, what can you think to do in that situation? What options are there? What other things could you do? If you were going to advise someone else what to do in this situation, what would you tell that person?"

When facilitating, it is important that you don't give students any suggestions about options. Instead, ask questions to help them arrive at the options on their own. This is important if they are ever expected to learn about the process of making choices. There is also a greater probability they will follow through on the choices they make if they have come up with the options on their own.

Let me give you an example using my first son, Moises, whom I adopted in the summer of 1986. When I adopted him at age 15, he had not been in school for three years and had a quite a long history with the law. At age thirteen, he attempted to kill a police officer. Because I was traveling doing a lot of lectures when I adopted Moises, I decided leaving him at home alone was not setting him up to succeed. So I put him in a private school--Father Flannigan's Boys Town. He came home on the weekends, summers, and vacations.

One of the first things I learned when I took in Moises was the vast quantity of food that teenage boys consume. One Sunday, we had completed our normal dinner meal. Moises had three pieces of chicken, four helpings of potatoes, three pieces of pie for dessert, and about fourteen rolls--just a little snack to tide

him over. We then got ready to leave for Boy's Town, which is about an hour-long drive from our home. By the time we were all packed and ready to go, it had been two hours since we last ate. Of course, because the ride takes an hour and Moises would starve on the way, we stopped at a McDonald's before getting on the freeway and ordered two hamburgers, fries, and a milkshake. As we pulled up to the window to pay, I took a twenty-dollar bill out of my purse and Moises said, "Oh no! I forgot my allowance at home! I left the ten dollar bill on the counter in the kitchen." I replied, "Moises, you have a problem. What are you going to do about it? What are your options?"

As I was holding out my hand to get my change, Moises said, "Well, you could take me back home and I could get it." The lady counted my change: a ten dollar bill, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen and some coins. I brought the money into the car very slowly, making it obvious as I was putting it in my purse. I said, "Yes, that's an option. What else could you do?" "Well," he replied, "I guess I could just go without my allowance this week." I said, "That's also an option. What else could you do?" "Well, I know," he said as I was straightening out the ten-dollar bill and putting it in my purse, "You are coming on Thursday to have a conference with my counselor, and you could bring the ten dollars then." I recognized that was another option, and asked him if he could think of anything else as I snapped my purse shut. "That's all I can think of," he said.

We then reviewed all the options he came up with. "What will happen if you choose the first?" I asked him. He said, "Well, if I ask you to go back home you'll say no." I said, "That's right." The rule in our house is that if you want it, you take it with you when you leave. The same rule applies to everyone. If I get on the plane and leave something at home, it stays at home. That's real life. Moises said, "I knew you would say that, but I just thought I'd ask anyway. If I choose the second option, I'll have to go all week without any money for treats. I won't be able to play any video games. It'd be terrible!" "Okay," I said, "What if you pick the third?" He replied, "Well, at least I'd have money Thursday afternoon and all day Friday." "So, what's it going to be?" I asked him. He said, "I'll do the third. Will you bring my money when you come on Thursday?" "Sure," I replied. It never occurred to him to trade the ten-dollar bill in my purse for the ten-dollar bill on the kitchen counter at home. Because it didn't occur to him, I didn't give him the option.

If what we want is independent functioning human beings, they must possess personal power. Personal power is the ability to get what you want in ways that maintain dignity and respect for yourself and others. Personal power rests on choice: the more choices you can identify in any given situation, the more personal power you have. My goal for Moises was not an immediate solution to his problem, but that twenty years from now, when he runs into a problem, he'll be able to come up with five hundred

solutions on his own. How is going to learn to do that? He learns it by practicing now.

I think of students as having an option bank in their heads. The choice bank. When you do banking, there are two things you can do: make deposits and make withdrawals. Have you ever noticed that it is impossible to do these two functions at the same time? When you are in a problem-solving situation with a student, it is the time to get withdrawals from the students's choice bank. When you are not in the problem-solving situation, that is the time to make deposits.

A month later Moises and I were driving back to Boy's Town, and I said to him, "Moises, remember when you forgot your allowance on the counter?" "Yea," he replied, "And I haven't forgotten it since either!" "Good memory!" I responded. "Let's think back. Would there have been anything else that you could have done in that situation, any other options that you might have used? Where were we?" I asked. "Going through a McDonald's," he answered. "Okay," I started, "What had we done? I had just given the lady a twenty-dollar bill, and what did I get back from her?" "Money." "What kind of money, Moises?" I asked. "Green money," he exclaimed. (Children can be such a joy!) "What denomination?" "Well, let's see," he pondered, "She gave you a-- she gave you a ten-dollar bill. I could have traded! Would you have traded ten-dollar bills with me?" I said, "Of course I would have." When he asked me why I didn't, I

repeated his question back to him. "Because," he said, "You want me to grow up and have personal power." That's right.

Many people call me a purist on this point because they all agree they probably would have given Moises the ten-dollar bill. But you see, I'm interested in twenty years from now, not the immediate present. How are students ever going to learn to come up with a broad range of options to choose from if we don't help them to practice option-selection now?

When you use the facilitating technique with adolescents, not all the options they choose nor the decisions they make are especially wonderful. Frequently, they are not the options you would choose as an adult. But as long as it is not physically or morally threatening, then I let them work it through on their own. That's how they learn. Learning to choose options and make decisions is a lot like learning to ride a bicycle. When you are learning to ride a bike, what happens? You fall off. When you are learning to make decisions, what happens? You make some bad ones. It's all part of the learning process.

I'd like now to turn to the fifth technique for helping students become more internally motivated--positive role models. In particular, I will be talking about two different kinds of role models.

What I find with many students is that they don't understand the meaning of the term "role model." They think a role model is somebody you want to be like. On the contrary, a role model is somebody who has qualities you'd like to emulate, or qualities

you would like to have in your life. For instance, you may admire somebody because of his or her courage, or you might admire somebody because, when the going gets tough, that person doesn't give up. "He's really got guts, and stuck with it. I'd like to have that quality in my life."

Role models can be extremely powerful for students. Most successful adults have role models who influenced them all their lives, and these role models were MOST OFTEN identified in their early teenage years. What concerns me enormously in our society is the kind of role models we provide for our students. Look at television and the movies. The problem is that the majority of the role models our students have to choose from all use the same method to solve problems: violence. And people wonder why violence is increasing in our society today!

By the time students graduate from high school, they have spent 14,000 hours in class and 21,000 hours in front of the television set. No wonder our students resort to violence! It is the behavior we give them to emulate. What I want to do is give students role models who are positive. I think the place to start is with who you are. THE MOST POWERFUL GIFT YOU HAVE TO GIVE TO ANOTHER HUMAN BEING IS THE MODEL OF WHO YOU ARE.

Another meaningful category of role models for adolescents is to be found among their own peers. Peers who have succeeded in overcoming failure, abuse, or difficult personal circumstances are particularly useful role models for at-risk students. Such

role models are already present in most schools. We all have at-risk students who have success stories to share.

In summary, I strongly urge you to employ the five techniques I have shared with you today: 1) develop a personal relationship with each student; 2) focus on the positive, rather than the negative, during the learning evaluation process; 3) develop positive expectations about student behavior; 4) facilitate, rather than direct, the selection and choice of options; and 5) establish positive role models for students to emulate. These represent five tools that can enable you, like Michelangelo, to release the beautiful human being trapped inside each and every one of your students.

For more information on working effectively with at-risk students, contact:

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